

Towards the enhancement of e-democracy: identifying the notion of the 'middleman paradox'

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Abstract. *The challenge towards e-democracy, through the electronic transformation of political systems, has become increasingly evident within developed economies. It is regarded as an approach for increased and better quality citizen participation in the democratic processes. E-democracy forms a component of overall e-government initiatives where technology adoption and diffusion, to enhance wider access to, and the delivery of, government services, are apparent. However, previous research demonstrates that very few e-democracy proposals survive the stage of formal political decision-making to become substantive e-government projects within national or international agendas. Furthermore, the implementation of e-democracy projects is undertaken at a much slower pace and with dramatically less support than the implementation of other, so-called e-administration, activities in the public sector.*

The research in this paper considers the notion of the 'middleman paradox', presenting theoretical and empirical evidence that further investigates the phenomenon associated with potential e-democracy improvements. Specifically, the paper adds a new dimension to existing theories on the hesitant evolution of e-democracy that clearly identifies politicians as an inhibiting factor. Proposals are made for an enhancement of these processes, and suggestions for further applicable research are demonstrated.

Keywords: e-government, e-administration, e-democracy, digital democracy

INTRODUCTION

As the awareness for e-government is increasing, governments and societies all around the globe are engaging with a digital future for the public sector. Government agencies are using technology to enhance the access to, and the delivery of, government services to citizens,

business partners and employees (Heeks, 2001). E-government is not only about changes in the area of public administration but also about changes in the area of public decision-making. Internal as well as external communications and operations are affected through the emerging and strategic use of information technology (IT) in the public sector (Grönlund, 2002).

Therefore, e-government is not only a term that refers to the transformation of governmental services, so-called e-administration, but also about the transformation of political systems, so-called e-democracy (Gisler, 2000; Schedler, 2000; Agren, 2001; Merz, 2001; Grönlund, 2002). Definitions of e-government vary but generally contain goals of more efficient operations, better quality of services and increased citizen participation in democratic processes (Grönlund, 2002). E-administration is directed to meet the needs and expectations of citizens. It is an attempt to optimize the internal processes of public administration, leading to a reduction of internal processing time and an enhancement of internal communications. Therefore, this administration, together with cost reduction and the identification of new outsourcing opportunities (Heeks, 2002; Mahrer, 2002), generates more flexibility and lower response times of administrative bodies (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Heeks, 2001). E-Democracy is generally regarded as a tool for abandoning the representative system for one with a more direct citizen engagement (Becker, 2001; Grönlund, 2001; Browning, 2002; Davis *et al.*, 2002). To achieve these overall goals, government officials are trying to develop adequate e-government strategies that will determine to a large extent the success or failure of the ensuing e-government projects.

These newly formulated e-government strategies are addressing a vast number of projects in the area of e-administration, and there is substantial empirical evidence about the success of the majority of these initiatives (United Nations, 2003). However, it is frequently questioned why the same strategies are only addressing e-democracy as a rhetorical promise (Coleman, 1999; Moore, 1999; Anttiroiko, 2001). Still, the claims about the benefits of e-democracy can be found within e-government strategies on the international and national level, but these claims are fundamentally lacking empirical evidence concerning the effects of proposed projects. Compared to the total amount of e-administration projects within different e-government initiatives, the amount of e-democracy projects is negligible (Wilhelm, 2000; Agren, 2001; Anttiroiko, 2001; Betz & Bargmann, 2003). As the United Nations Global e-government survey states quite clearly, 'The world's top 20 countries in the area of e-government, on average, are currently providing on-line opportunities for citizen participation that are seriously lacking in relevancy and usefulness, and are at only a third of the potential of what they could offer' (United Nations, 2003).

Consequently, the research in this paper attempts to add a new dimension to existing theories on the hesitant evolution of e-democracy – the 'middleman paradox'. The paper is organized as follows. First, we discuss the theoretical framework concerning the fields of political communication, e-government and e-democracy, and our research objectives. An exploratory research design is adopted, and we present the findings of our multiple case study. The cross-case analysis is followed by a discussion in which we relate our findings to theories of e-government and e-democracy evolution.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Historically, the internet has been the subject of many discussions on how to influence the extension of democracy. There are frequently reported expectations to develop a virtual agora to involve citizens (Rheingold, 1993; Barber, 1998; Gilder, 2000). However, the reality remains that the internet appears to enlarge the inequalities of the digital divide within information-rich and information-poor environments (Haywood, 1995; Golding, 1996). Neutral analysis and opinions remark that so far the influence of the internet in politics has been limited to fund raising, and only in rare cases does it help organize grassroots support (Bimber, 2001; Leggewie & Bieber, 2001; Foot & Schneider, 2002). As the effects on different western democracies are still in their early stages, observers raise an ever increasing number of challenging questions concerning the impacts that the internet could have on the concept of democracy: Following the idea of deliberation (Fishkin, 1991; Ackerman & Fishkin, 2004; Van Aaken *et al.*, 2004), will democracy still need its experts (politicians) to balance society's different interests? Will we have more direct democracies than representative democracies? Will there be a broadening of the spectrum of the politically engaged population? Will there be a fragmentation of the sense of community and legitimacy that underpins central governments and central parliaments (Morris & Ogan, 1996; Nugent, 2001; Applbaum, 2002; Levin, 2002; Nye, 2002; Schlosberg & Dryzek, 2002; Thompson, 2002)? Analysts who study the internet and its impact on political processes seek to address these questions, but empirically grounded and theoretically satisfying insights remain elusive.

However, the literature on e-government often argues that e-democracy is founded on the idea of streamlining political communications and altering aspects of political decision-making in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of democracy (Hague & Loader, 1999; Schuler, 2001; Watson & Mundy, 2001; Browning, 2002; Gross, 2002; Mahrer & Brandtweiner, 2004). In Mahrer's society/media/politics (SMP) model for political communication, (Mahrer, 2003) e-government reports the transformation of the continuous cycle of political communication between various players within these three different spheres. According to the model, the cycle is based on four different stages of interaction:

- 1 public discussion of political ideas and issues;
- 2 formal decision-making;
- 3 implementation and execution of decisions; and
- 4 public elections.

Figure 1 shows the stakeholders within the SMP model for gathering information who are attempting to communicate with one another or even carrying out transactions for political communication. These interactions between different groups can also be defined as processes of information, feedback/consultation and participation (Watson & Mundy, 2001; Macintosh, 2004).

Combining these approaches enables research on e-democracy to be clustered within the e-government research portfolio. Figure 2 is a mapping of the areas of interaction with administration – including interaction with government and jurisdiction – (e-administration) and of

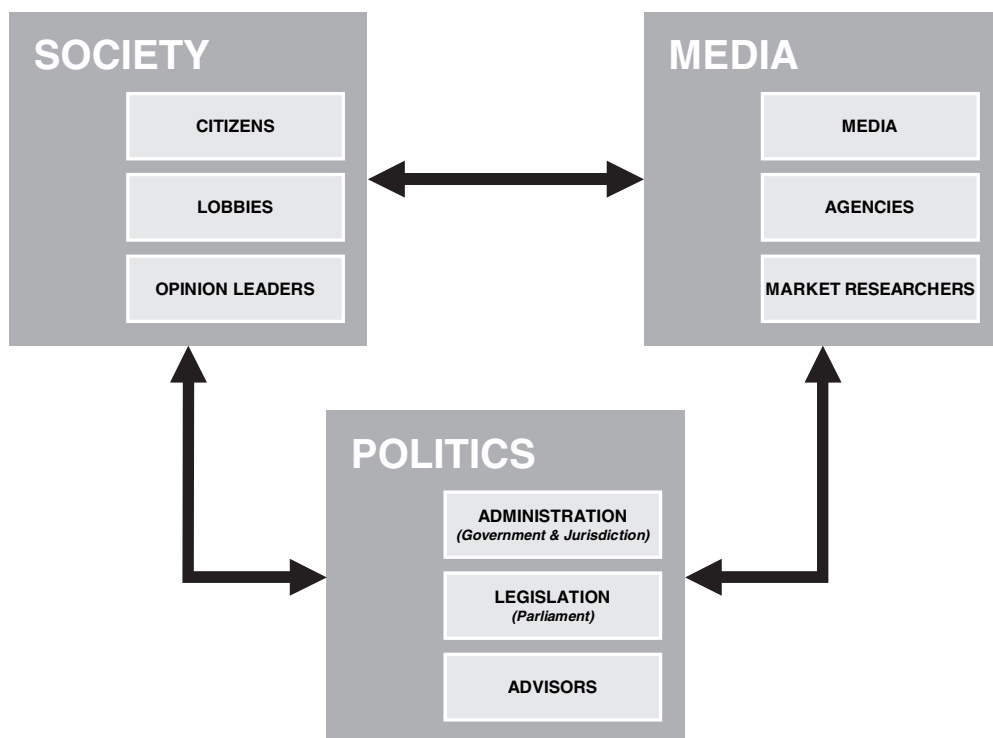


Figure 1. The players within the society/media/politics model.

interaction with legislation (e-democracy) within the SMP model. The 12 arrays characterize the complex procedural interplay between the systems of society, media and politics. The research portfolio also shows that e-democracy is not only about technology (and involves both so-called e-participation and e-voting) but also impacts every aspect of an organization involved. In addition, it captures the behaviour of the members of the society (citizens, lobbies and opinion leaders), the media (media, agencies and market researchers) when interacting with, and attitudes towards, government agencies and representatives.

Unfortunately, despite the substantial body of knowledge with regard to the evolution of the different applications of e-administration and e-democracy, described in the e-government research portfolio above, the reason why so few countries worldwide are utilizing the full potential of e-government as a tool is uncertain. In particular, why are so many countries not facing the challenge of involving the public in participatory and deliberative thought processes that could augment government's decision-making? Current research findings demonstrate that citizen participation remains patchy and uneven in all countries around the globe, with its full potential underutilized (United Nations, 2003). It is frequently argued that the vast majority of government IT spending is focused on the administrative processes, and it is also noted that

| Phases of interaction Stages of political communication | Information | Communication, Feedback & Consultation | Transaction & Participation |
|--|--|---|--|
| Public Discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative Information System (eA) • Parliament Information System (eD) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chat/Discussion Boards with Administrators (eA) • Chat/Discussion Boards with Legislators (eD) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Public Consultation (eD) |
| Formal Decision Making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative Information System (eA) • Parliament Information System (eD) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Legal Consultation (eA) • Online Petition (eD) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Popular Initiative (eD) • Online Referendum (eD) |
| Implementation and Execution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal Information System (eA/eD) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Citizen Feedback (eA/eD) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Applications via Administrative Information System (eA) |
| Elections | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Election Information Service (eA) • Electee Programme Information System (eD) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chat/Discussion Boards with Politician Participation (eD) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Election Stock Market (eD) • Online Voting (eD) |

Figure 2. The e-government research portfolio. eD, e-democracy (interaction with legislation); eA, e-administration (interaction with government and jurisdiction).

the 'services first and democracy later' approach to e-government is a significant barrier to a balanced and successful e-government programme (Clift, 2002). A recently published report by the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development on the promise and problems of e-democracy identified some of the major barriers to digital citizen engagement and identified five main challenges, using the citizen as a point of reference (Macintosh, 2003). These are: coping with the problem of scale; building capacity and active citizenship; ensuring coherence throughout the policy-making progress; evaluating the benefits and impacts of offering digital citizen engagement; and ensuring government commitment.

Related to our conceptual framework of the SMP model (Figure 1), the members of the spheres of the society and the media are enthusiastically calling for a more committed transformation of the political system towards active citizen participation within the democratic process (Mahrer *et al.*, 2003a, b). It is observed that different levels of support for, and commitment to, e-administration and e-democracy are offered by political decision makers. The research objectives within this paper therefore are to identify what could be hindering the improvement of the topology and the introduction of new vehicles for democratic practice based on existing e-government strategies. Realizing that newly implemented e-government

strategies were not addressing e-democracy at all, or were only addressing e-democracy as a rhetorical promise, we formulated our overall research question mainly relating to the members of the sphere of politics – as our point of reference – as described in the SMP model: Are politicians promoting the further evolution of e-democracy to a much lesser extent than they are the evolution of e-administration, and if so why?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Our research team decided that consistent with the focus of our research, an exploratory approach would be the most appropriate method of collecting data within the political system to provide insights to our research question. As the case study approach refers to an in-depth study or investigation of a contemporary phenomenon using multiple sources of evidence within its real-life context, we set up a multiple case study design (Figure 3) using a theoretical replication logic (Yin, 1994). By following this case research design we had the opportunity to engage in theory-building in an area in which there has been relatively little prior research

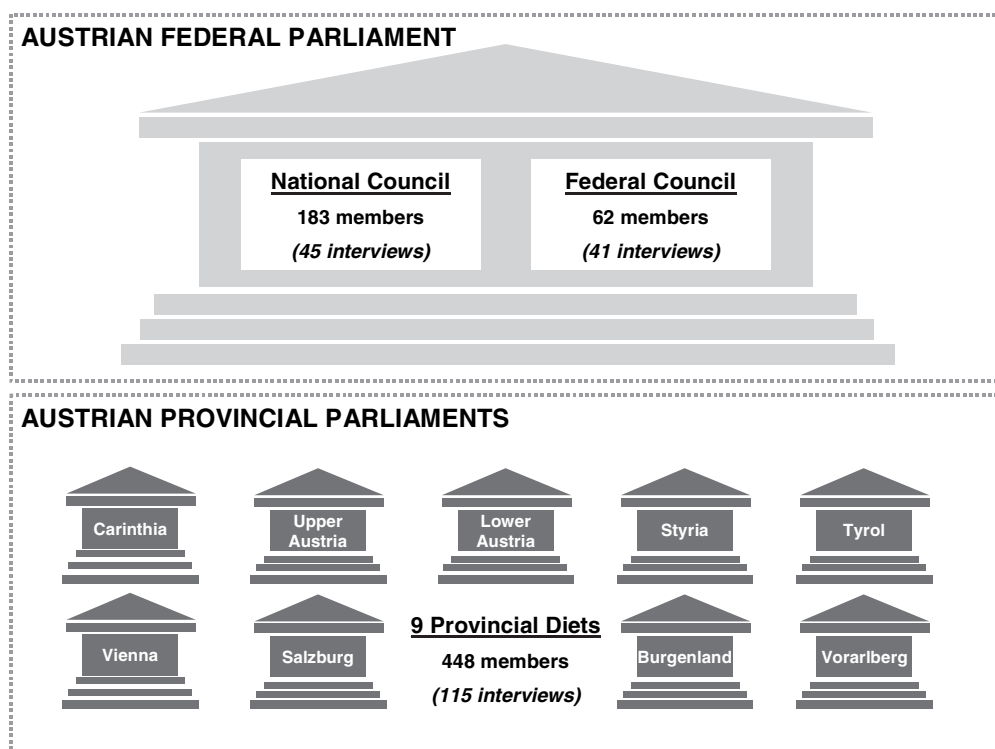


Figure 3. Multiple case study design.

(Benbasat *et al.*, 1987). We tried to begin as close as possible to the ideal of no theory under consideration and no hypotheses to test (Eisenhardt, 1989).

We selected cases that fell into two different categories: the first comprises the two chambers of the Austrian Parliament (National Council and Federal Council); the second comprises all nine Provincial Diets. We sought cases that differed on being active or passive in the Austrian discussion about e-democracy. We collected data using multiple methods, including documentation, archival records, protocols, minutes, reports, speeches, vision statements, white papers, strategy reports and interviews, as well as internal discussion papers of the different political parties.

Overall, 201 semistructured, open-ended interviews were administered as important sources of information to provide for focus, reliability and increased validity (Yin, 1994). We conducted these interviews with members of parliament of all government and opposition parties according to the SMP model of our research framework (Mahrer, 2003). The interviews with the relevant decision makers of the National Council (45) and Federal Council (41) and with members of the nine Provincial Diets: Vienna (28), Lower Austria (14), Upper Austria (12), Salzburg (9), Tyrol (10), Vorarlberg (7), Burgenland (8), Styria (16) and Carinthia (11) were used to allow participants to give their personal experience and interpretation of the ongoing e-government discussion. All interviews were conducted by two-person teams, with one researcher handling the interview questions, while the other recorded notes and observations. As many members of parliament would not permit recording, we used this common and successful procedure for undertaking interviews in case study research to obtain valid data (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988).

By combining as many methods as possible we added richness and depth to our research findings. The research team also used multiple investigators to enhance the creative potential of the study and to increase confidence in our findings. This involved the convergence of the observations from our multiple investigators, knowing the conflicting views could deter our research from premature closure (Eisenhardt, 1989). After transcription of the interviews, a case study database was built and used to manage this voluminous data and allowed all members of the research team to review all data collected directly.

During the analytical phase, which was to some extent overlapping with the data collection phase, different techniques were combined in an attempt to produce compelling and insightful conclusions. From time to time the research team wrote analytical memos that recorded the results of the tentative analyses and were based on our researchers field notes (Barley, 1990). For our initial data analyses one group of researchers used open-coding procedures and the other group used template analysis coding procedures. At this stage one part of the research team had no idea of what the data categories would be (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The other research team started their coding using the research template (King, 1998). Both teams coded the material separately and compared their analyses afterwards. Within-case analysis was followed by a cross-case analysis covering all 11 cases to search for cross-case patterns by using divergent techniques. The collection of multiple types of data from different sources provided triangulation and increased the reliability of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1984). During one stage of the cross-case analysis the research team looked for similarities and differ-

ences between each of the 11 cases covering all the data. Afterwards, we tried another analysis and divided the data by data source to go beyond initial impressions (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Following an overall grounded theory approach, the research team iterated between the empirical data and possible theoretical conceptualization (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). By developing conjectures we attempted to compare systematically our emergent concept with the evidence from each case in order to assess how well or poorly it fitted with the data. As our findings were confirmed, at this stage of the research project, we started to compare our emergent concept with existing literature on the evolution of e-democracy, both conflicting and supporting literature, in order to enhance internal validity and further sharpen our final concept.

CASE BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION

The first Austrian policy document that could be called an e-government policy was created in 1997 by the Austrian Chancellery with the name 'Information Society' (Knoll & Grossendorfer, 1997). This ambitious programme concentrated on various aspects of IT diffusion and on how to lead Austria into the 21st century and addressed topics such as e-business, e-government and even e-democracy for the first time. The members of the working group – mainly senior government officials – were very sceptical towards e-democracy, despite the fact that the policy stated citizen participation in online dialogue could demonstrate an e-democracy future that could transform politics in highly effective ways. The so-called digital divide was seen as the main driver for unequal conditions in the consequent ability to access public services. So in the end, measures to counteract the digital divide were recommended, and measures promoting e-democracy were declined.

The current Austrian information and communications technology strategy is dominated by the European Commission's e-Europe initiative and its predecessors (EC, 1994; EC, 1997; EC, 1999; EC, 2002), with 'e-Austria in e-Europe' (Bundeskanzleramt, 2002) being the Austrian equivalent to it. This initiative is led by the Chief Information Office of the Austrian Federal Chancellery which published its own much more detailed e-government master plan (Posch, 2002). It became apparent that it was not possible to consolidate and expand what had been achieved so far in developing new e-government activities. Consequently, the Austrian Federal Government announced details of a new e-government agenda enabled by the Council of Ministers in May 2003 (Bundeskanzleramt, 2003). The ongoing initiative is composed of a new set of measures, co-ordinated with regional and local authorities, designed to implement a nationwide, uniform approach to e-government. Only one e-democracy project is included in the roadmap for 2004 and 2005 that consists of 70 e-government projects to be implemented within the next two years (Rupp, 2003). E-Democracy is addressed as an important topic for the future, but no concrete actions are proposed. All e-government documents on the regional level published by the nine Provincial Diets are totally lacking any statements concerning e-democracy.

Currently, there are a limited number of Austrian e-democracy examples, with only a few initiated by the academic sector as either pilot projects or applications restricted to a special local area with little public attention such as the 'E-Voting Project' for the student union elections run by the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration (Prosser *et al.*, 2004) or the 'Online Election Stock Market' research project, which tried to predict the results of the regional election in Tyrol during 2003 (Filzmaier & Beyrl, 2003).

CASE FINDINGS

It is primarily the results of the cross-case analysis that are analysed in the following section of this paper. The research findings are reported by presenting evidence in the form of specific examples and comments gathered through the interview process. To make the discussion of these findings more meaningful, they are related to the two opposed aspects of the research question: politicians' support for e-administration and for e-democracy.

Parliamentarians and e-administration

Surprisingly, Austrian Parliamentarians are very well informed about the Federal Government's e-government activities, which can solely be found in the area of e-administration. Politicians of all parties frequently praise the positive effects of e-government at every opportunity. They also have a very high level of knowledge concerning the Austrian e-government vision. Some of the parliamentarians are actually able to name specific e-government projects that are related to potential scale economies and reduction of costs. E-government is advertised to the public as being a core of the long-delayed but eagerly awaited administrative reform with the ultimate goal of easing budgetary constraints at federal and provincial levels.

The vast majority of the Austrian parliamentarians are confident that with e-government politicians will be able to fulfil the obligation of finally reducing bureaucracy. Therefore, it is unsurprising that members of parliament view themselves as emissaries of a new, efficient, effective and consequently much cheaper system of public administration. However, despite their high expectations of e-government, there was a clear consensus across all interviews that e-government would change the administrative system only in the long run and that there were some substantial barriers hindering its further evolution. Parliamentarians also view a lack of resources and training as well as security and privacy issues as the most significant barriers to e-government. A member of the National Council described the situation as follows:

The problem of unequal access to the internet is causing the problem of social exclusion. I think we are doing quite well compared to other countries but we also know that this problem will not easily be solved.

A parliamentarian who is a spokesman for IT issues on the provincial level noted:

The digital divide is a serious problem. There is a whole set of measures which should successfully oppose a further widening of the digital skills gap. Together with international and

local companies we will invest much more money in continuous IT education, and for the next year we are planning to increase public funding for an improvement of our broadband infrastructure.

A large group of politicians interviewed are also aware that there are at least as many barriers on the demand side of e-government as can be found on the supply side. Especially, members of the Provincial Diets – who have a much closer relationship to the regional administrative bodies – mentioned very clearly that e-government is not mainly about technology but that it also relates primarily to organizational and cultural change. In summary, for parliamentarians, the support for the further evolution of e-administration is not only reasonable but also necessary for the transformation of the administrative system. In addition, the interviews revealed another driver for the politicians' support of e-administration. In order to stem the decline of public confidence in government, the Austrian parliamentarians, together with their colleagues running for election, have identified e-government as a vehicle for improving the performance of public administration that should reduce the citizens' dissatisfaction with their political representatives.

Parliamentarians and e-democracy

Compared to e-administration, in the best case, e-democracy represents only a secondary existence in the minds of the Austrian parliamentarians. Generally, they do find the concept of e-democracy 'quite interesting', 'promising', and 'beneficial for democracy' as stated in official e-government documents and white papers issued by the different political parties or legislative bodies. While discussing the opportunities for more citizens' participation that the concepts of e-democracy are proposing, the politicians are very reserved on sharing their true position. Interestingly, we were able to observe a certain change in the politicians' path of argumentation against e-democracy during nearly all the interviews.

The first argument that the majority of the parliamentarians brought forward during the interviews was that it was current opinion that there would be important barriers that would hinder the implementation of e-democracy concepts. The politicians named the same barriers they had already mentioned when discussing e-administration: security and privacy issues, social exclusion and the digital divide, and the potential for manipulation. Unlike the previous discussions, the vast majority of the parliamentarians stated that there would be only very little chances of overcoming these barriers. During all the interviews this was the initial reason presented for justifying their marginal support for e-democracy. When asked for a more specific explanation of their arguments compared to their position on the potential of overcoming the same barriers in the area of e-administration, many of the politicians changed their course of argumentation. They tried to argue that the ordinary citizen was 'uninterested' in politics and 'unqualified' to participate. A member of a Provincial Diet described the rationale behind the approach by saying:

There's more and more information for all of us and the process of political decision-making is getting more complex year by year. Now the citizens should work this out by themselves?

I think that's quite a silly concept. It's our job to deal with this complexity. That's why we become elected.

When asked about the future role of citizens in the process of political decision-making the majority of the politicians stated that the most important participatory activity for the citizens should be casting a vote into a ballot box. The further part of the interviews once again was directed towards a new set of arguments when the issue of displacement of political representation, as outlined in some concepts of e-democracy, appeared on the agenda of the interview. The responses from this specific focus were revealing as one parliamentarian, being more elegant in his argument, noted:

E-administration can facilitate changes and flexibility where red tape has caused torpor. This is not mainly an issue of influence or power, but an issue of more efficiency and effectiveness for the benefit of the citizens. But e-democracy would change the current balance of power towards the uninformed citizen. Do you really believe that a single representative will support this idea?

However, several politicians commented in a rather more straightforward way:

At the end of the day it is a question of power. More citizens' participation leads to a loss of power for the members of the political elite. We do not oppose a higher degree of transparency for the political system or a better flow of information related to our work towards the citizens. All these ideas are quite reasonable. But enabling the voters deciding on all and everything? That would cause the total annihilation of our system, of our networks and of our lobbies. For me and my colleagues it is a dangerous and alarming idea to let the internet take over the role of the political representatives. Very dangerous indeed. Politics is about balancing of interests of the people for the people.

Another parliamentarian who also confirmed that his colleagues are very much aware of the effects that e-democracy could cause and that the topic was already frequently discussed in internal committees noted:

A lot of my colleagues fear that we will see the internet causing the same effects of reorganization in the political system that the increased use of information systems has already caused in the private sector: more and more automating followed by layoffs. That's not what we want. We will definitely oppose such a development.

The vast majority of parliamentarians of all legislative bodies are taking a tough stance against the idea of more citizens' participation. One younger member of the Federal Council commented:

It is not about removing e-democracy from the agenda but to make sure that it will not appear on the agenda.

From the findings of our interviews, it is evident that currently the vast majority of Austria's politicians are very actively opposing e-democracy, although they are surprisingly well informed about its different concepts. Our observations would classify the possibly true reasons for their

approach into two groups: collective opposition to change and personal fear of change. First, parliamentarians in Austria strongly believe in the concept of representative democracy and are with the same dedication opposing any concept of deliberation. They are confident that they are much more qualified than the ordinary citizen and believe devoutly that it is solely the duty of the elite to make political decisions for all citizens. The different parties have discussed new concepts of digital democracy that propose much more citizen engagements. In this respect, the political systems seem to develop a widespread collective and distinctive scepticism concerning these concepts. This scepticism is driven by the fear of a lasting loss of power for the political elite when supporting e-democracy. They expect the political system as they know it to transform dramatically when changing the balance of power. Second, these notions make them believe that they are indispensable. Concepts of e-democracy that are highlighting the displacement of political representation are clearly threatening to individual politicians. Not only the ill-informed (making up only a small group in Austria) but also the very well-informed e-government experts among the parliamentarians are personally concerned about their own political future.

Fear of change appears to be the politicians' main driver for interfering with the further evolution of e-democracy. This leads to a special situation – the 'middleman paradox' – as the very same parliamentarians who would be responsible for introducing new forms of citizens' participation for political decision-making are explicitly and implicitly opposing these reforms.

Based on our findings, we want to shape the conjecture that the more citizens' participation-specific concepts of e-democracy are suggesting the less support for these concepts will be provided by politicians. The scenario cross in Figure 4 relates our assumption to Aström's model (Aström, 2001) of different dimensions of democracy which would add our emergent concept of the 'middleman paradox' to existing literature and theory in the area of e-democracy, political support and commitment for e-government (Margetts & Dunleavy, 2002; Chadwick & May, 2003; Jensen, 2003; Macintosh, 2003). On the horizontal axis the diagram is showing the 'level of citizens' participation with the 'level of political support for e-democracy concepts' on the vertical axis. The model suggests that in a 'thin democracy', the voter only wants to be informed as the mandate of the elected is open and therefore does not require direct citizen input. This would be an e-democracy scenario that would gain substantial support by the politicians as it presents no threat to their position. In the scenarios of 'strong democracy', which introduces the citizen as the former of opinions, the elected officials have to maintain constant interaction with the voters. The scenario of 'quick democracy', where the voters decide on all and everything and therefore do not have the time to discuss all of the topics in depth, would gain less or no support by the politicians. These concepts would dramatically alter the way political decisions are made and, to a more or less extent, displace the political representatives boosting deliberation.

LIMITATIONS

The findings of our research suffer from the usual limitations of interpretive case studies, in terms of generalization. As with any empirical investigation, weakness in the methodology and

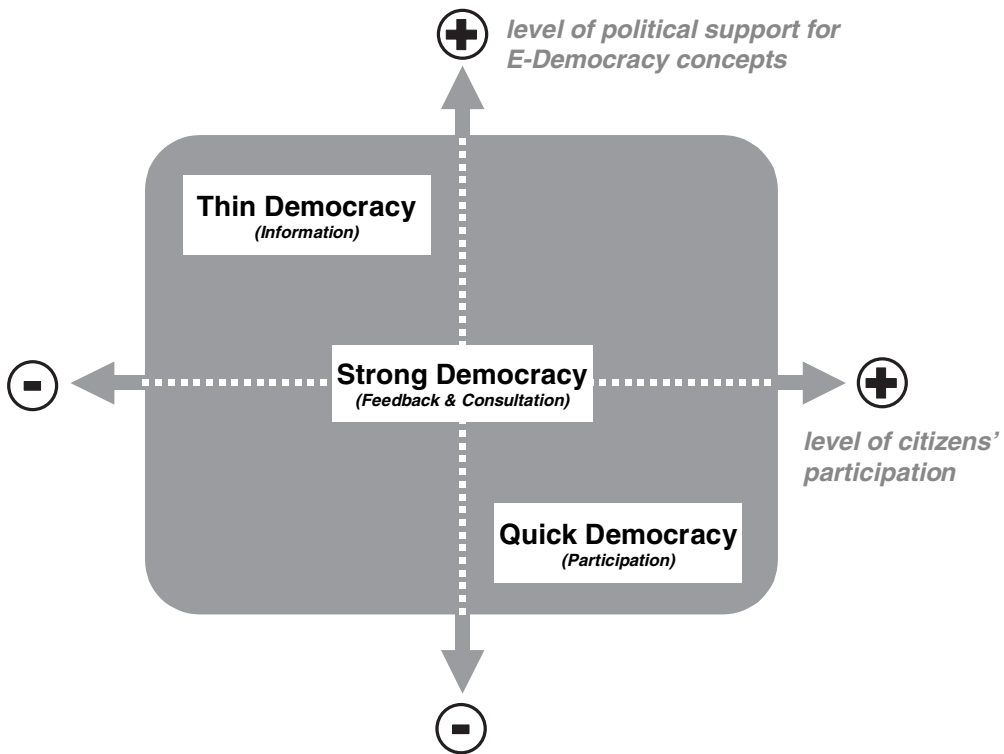


Figure 4. Support for concepts of e-democracy.

data will be present, and this study is no different. Two limitations, in particular, should be mentioned. First, we wanted to engage in theory-building in an area in which there has been relatively little prior research and therefore our observations could not be compared with a copious knowledge pool of previously consolidated findings. Second, the data utilized in this study were collected exclusively from legislative bodies in Austria. Although these 11 parliaments from the national and regional level may be representative of others throughout the world, this is by no means certain. As a result of these limitations some amount of scepticism is appropriate with regard to our findings. However, at the very least, the identification of the 'middleman paradox' in this study provides a good starting point for further research of the politicians' role for the future of e-democracy.

CONCLUSION

This paper provides an in-depth study of why politicians are inhibiting the further evolution of e-democracy. It illustrates that there are different levels of support for a variety of concepts

within e-government. Politicians are explicitly and implicitly fostering all activities in the area of e-administration, but they are otherwise interfering explicitly and implicitly in the advancement of e-democracy. Certainly, no examination of just 11 legislative bodies within only one country can produce a definitive generalization about the attitudes of politicians towards e-democracy around the globe. Nevertheless, the 'middleman paradox' introduced in our study describes that the very same politicians who would be responsible for introducing new forms of citizens' participation for political decision-making are afraid of a displacement of political representation and are therefore opposing more civic engagement.

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